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Promoting an International Conference to Solve the Jewish Problem: The New Zionist Organization's Alliance with Poland, 1938–1939

HOWARD (CHANOCH) ROSENBLUM

IN 1935, the Revisionist Party, led by Vladimir Jabotinsky, announced from the headquarters of its Executive in Paris that it was seceding from the Zionist Organization (ZO) and reconstituting itself as the New Zionist Organization (NZO). The formal convocation of the NZO at a founding Congress in Vienna was an attempt at creating a competing body which would function in a manner parallel to the ZO.

The Revisionist Party defined itself as a political movement and regarded diplomatic activity as central. Yet all the while it remained within the ZO it was precluded by the latter's statutes on Zionist discipline from engaging in independent diplomatic activity. Freed of the constraints imposed by the ZO, the NZO embarked upon a diplomatic initiative which was predicated at the first stage on the development of close political ties with the Polish Government. The reason for this was not hard to find: the NZO's major base of support was in Poland. Over time, the Polish alignment was expanded upon to include other East-Central European governments.

The NZO's central aim was to array those East-Central European governments who were eager to see their Jews emigrate, have them raise the Jewish question as an international problem within a world forum, and put pressure on the British to open Palestine to massive Jewish immigration. While the Poles, Romanians and their allies were interested primarily in the emigration of their Jews, and not in Zionism, the NZO was convinced that the dearth of alternative outlets would force them ultimately to concentrate their efforts on Palestine. The NZO also maintained that this bloc was of major political and strategic importance to the British and would therefore counterbalance whatever influence the Arabs could exert.

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The NZO first attempted to apply the policy of alliances during the summer of 1936 when it broached the idea of an international conference. It conceived of having the League of Nations convoke the conference with two to three states with an interest in Jewish emigration, such as Poland, acting as sponsors.¹ The intended effect was to counter the influence of the Arabs on the workings of the Royal Commission, which, under the chairmanship of Lord Peel, had been appointed to investigate the underlying causes of the disturbances which broke out in Palestine in April 1936. It was empowered to examine the manner in which the Palestine mandate was being implemented, determine the legitimacy of Arab and Jewish grievances and make recommendations on how they could best be remedied. The Commission was scheduled to arrive and begin its hearings in Palestine in November. Nothing ever came of the idea.

The NZO returned to the instrumentality of the international conference at the beginning of 1938 as a tactic to achieve the final aim, a Jewish state.² At such a conference, the NZO intended to submit its Ten-Year Plan for the settlement of one-and-a-half million Jews in Palestine and Transjordan over ten years with the aim of forming a Jewish state in all of Palestine.³

In a keynote address before the assembled delegates, at the NZO's Prague Convention which convened from 31 January to 7 February 1938, Jabotinsky declared:

We must demand that an international conference of states seeking justice be convened in order to solve the Jewish problem. Let us not be afraid that they may deviate from the correct path. There is no other path which one can conceive of, other than the one and only path — to give all of Palestine [to the Jews] in order to put an end to the distress of [the people of] Israel in its entirety.⁴

Jabotinsky expressed confidence that Palestine with all its limitations would ultimately be returned to as the solution to the Jewish problem, in talks he and Jacob Landau, editor of the Jewish Telegraphic Agency, held with the American Ambassador in Vienna, John C. Wiley, several days before the Convention opened. He was sanguine that Britain, which adhered to a policy of realism and flexibility, would

¹ Letters from Abrahams to the Murshim, 17 August 1936; from Altman to NZO, London, 20 August 1936; from Abrahams to the Murshim, 1 September 1936; from the Political Committee of the Murshim to the Nessiut, 3 September 1936, Palestine File, Jabotinsky Archives (JA), Tel-Aviv.

² Elijah Ben Horin, 'Veeda Beinleumit LePitron Sheelot HaYehudim', *HaDegel*, 25 February 1938, p. 4.

³ 'Political Resolutions of the NZO Convention', *Jewish Herald*, 4 March 1938, p. 3.

⁴ V. Jabotinsky, 'Mul Tochnit HaChaluka-Tochnit HeAsor [Opening Speech at the NZO Konvent], Prague, February 1938', *Neumim*, v, p. 299; *Jewish Herald*, 25 February 1938, pp. 4, 5.

come round to this position.⁵ This optimism also derived in large part from his perception of the League of Nations' permanence and the existence of the Permanent Mandates Commission as a powerful authoritative body.⁶ An interdependence of nations existed. In order to fight to uphold international commitments the smaller nations had to band together. In this way Britain would not be allowed to question its obligations to the weakest. Quoting Masaryk — that the cause of an unhappy people is a just cause and it will, therefore, be victorious, always, against all, and helped by all — he exclaimed, 'Great Britain will no more let you, the Czechs, down than us. Her word is a rock and she will keep it, she will not let down the smaller nations.'⁷

The NZO predicated the success of its initiative on behalf of an international conference on close collaboration with the Poles. To this end, the NZO closely co-ordinated and aligned its efforts with the policy being pursued by the Polish Government. The Polish Foreign Ministry was actively working for the creation of an international framework to address the Jewish problem. In keeping with this policy, in January 1938 the Polish Federation of Societies of the League of Nations Union (LNU) submitted a memorandum on the Jewish question. While the Union's recommendations were not legally binding on member nations of the League, its function as a body which represented a considerable cross-section of organized public opinion lent its pronouncements an aura of authority and importance.

The Polish memorandum was largely a reaction to the memorandum tendered by the Palestine Society, the component of the Jewish League of Nations Societies which represented the interests of the Jewish community in Palestine. The Palestine Society's memorandum of June 1937 had been highly critical of Poland's treatment of its Jews. The Polish memorandum, however, marked a departure from previous representations in several key respects. In it for the first time the Poles considered 'that the question of the Jewish minority in Poland, as in almost all other countries, is a distinct question, absolutely different from all other minority questions'.

The Poles also went beyond a mere refutation of Palestinian charges to declare that:

Whereas problems relating to all other minorities can for the most part be solved internally, either by unilateral measures adopted by a State or by a bilateral agreement between two States to ensure fair treatment of their respective minorities, a radical settlement of the Jewish question can only

⁵ Interview of Jabotinsky and Landau with Wiley on Palestine and the Jewish Problem, 25 January 1938, Washington D.C., National Archives of the United States (NA), 867N.01/1017.

⁶ *Chazon HaAm*, 11 February 1938.

⁷ *Jewish Herald*, 25 February 1938, pp. 4, 5.

be reached by agreement between several States. In this sense the Jewish question is essentially an international one.⁸

Not only does the Jewish question poison the political life of a great many countries but it is often exploited for political ends so that it is in the interest of democracy and peace that the question should be settled as speedily as possible once and for all.⁹

The Poles were not content simply to make out a case for an international conference. They submitted a draft resolution calling upon the League of Nations to convene without delay an international conference to solve the Jewish problem in Europe. They recommended directing Jewish immigration to countries containing only a small percentage of Jews, financially assisting Jews to emigrate from those countries where, because of their large numbers, they were a heavy burden on the national economy, and helping the Jews to create a Jewish state either in Palestine or on some other territory which offered facilities for massive Jewish settlement.¹⁰

They then followed up their initiative. On 14 February 1938 at the LNU session held in London, the Polish Federation's delegate, Dr Debski, on the basis of the Polish memorandum requested that the Jewish question be transferred from the jurisdiction of the Committee for Minority Affairs to the Legal and Political Committee. This resulted in an extraordinary session being called for 3 July 1938, on the eve of the opening of the general conference at Copenhagen to deliberate on both the Palestine Society's and the Polish Federation's memoranda.¹¹

The definition by the Poles of the Jewish problem as an international question, the necessity for a solution by an international forum and the threat posed by it to political stability and world peace tallied with the NZO's presentation of the case. The NZO, in pursuing its effort on behalf of an international conference, cited the Polish memorandum (scheduled for consideration at the LNU meeting at Copenhagen) in a positive light.¹² It drew parallels between the Polish proposal and its own deliberations at the Prague Convention, and stressed those elements which concurred with its own position, such as the solution of the Jewish problem through compact settlement and settlement in the whole of Palestine.¹³

⁸ 'Memorandum submitted by the Polish League of Nations Federation on the Jewish Question, January 1938', in Natan Feinberg, *HaAgudot HaYehudit LeMaan Chever HaLeumim*, Jerusalem, 1967, p. 172 (hereafter Feinberg).

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 188–89.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 190–91.

¹¹ Union Internationale, Commission des Questions Juridiques et Politiques, Procès-verbal de la Session de Londres, 14 Fevrier 1938, pp. 4–5; also Feinberg, pp. 124–25.

¹² Joseph Schechtman, 'HaVeeda HaBeinleumit LePitron Sheelat HaYehudim', *HaSchacher*, 18 March 1938, p. 5.

¹³ 'International Conference in the Air', *Zionews*, 1, 21 June 1938, p. 3.

The NZO's positive and unqualified appraisal differed drastically from the position held by the Zionist Executive and its representatives in the LNU's Palestine Society. The Palestine Society laid down several preconditions for any international conference: Jews would have to be invited, the conference would have to address the questions of equality and minority rights for Jews in their countries of residence as well as the issue of emigration, and the solution to the Jewish problem would have to be a Jewish state. Moreover, such a state could be established only in Palestine. These points were enunciated in the Palestine Society's memorandum to the Union of June 1938. The Palestine Society was committed to collaborate only with those states which were committed to honour equal rights for Jews.¹⁴

The Palestine Society's insistence that any solution to the Jewish problem would have to be within the framework of a Jewish state with such a state being established only in Palestine, underscored its concern over the growing interest being displayed in territorialism. The increase in anti-Semitism in East-Central Europe in the 1930s, and continuing impoverishment of the Jewish masses there, resulted in growing pressure to emigrate. Countries which were traditionally receptive to Jewish immigration in the past, in Western Europe and the Americas, were closed. The magnitude of the problem and the restrictive quotas placed by the British on immigration to Palestine meant that Palestine alone was unable to satisfy the need. Various Jewish groups and governmental bodies began to search for other territories, sparsely populated, in which Jews could be compactly and autonomously settled on a massive scale. Numerous areas were in fact investigated without result throughout the period, among them Ecuador, Madagascar, Angola, the Kimberley region of Australia, and British Guiana. The danger inherent in an international conference, in the Palestine Society's view, was that it might well recommend such a solution to the detriment of Zionism.

Little or no mention was made by the NZO leadership of the possible dangers and serious shortcomings of an international conference. Whatever criticism existed emanated from extremist circles within the movement. Among the detractors was one of the Palestinian members, the writer Uriel Halperin. He railed against the following possible pitfalls: by phrasing the Jewish problem in terms of excess Jews or as a humanitarian question of Jewish distress and passively demanding an activist solution from others, such as an international conference, one opened oneself to a territorialist solution. If members prided themselves on being part of a national movement it was incumbent upon

¹⁴ Feinberg, pp. 126–27, 130–31; 'Réplique de l'Association Palestiniennne pour la Société des Nations au Mémoire présenté par la Fédération Polonaise des Associations pour la Société des Nations au sujet du Problème Juif, Juin 1938', Copenhagen, 1938, pp. 201–03.

them to express their opposition to any unexpected form of territorialism and to any deviant alliance of this sort. It was essential to raise the banner of statehood, historic will and sovereignty, and not just to be saved from distress, he declared.¹⁵

It was only when forced to quiet fears raised by the rank and file that the leadership addressed itself to the question. Joseph Schechtman, liaison to Polish Government circles, argued that, unlike those Jews who feared a territorialist solution, the NZO position was that there was nothing to lose; all other solutions would fall away. The Zionist Executive's concern about the search for territories was played down as a transitory phenomenon. Ultimately all other possibilities would be eliminated and all sides forced back to a Palestine solution.¹⁶

The increasingly anti-Semitic character of the Polish regime also did not act as a deterrent to the formation of close ties between the NZO and the authorities. The NZO largely accepted the Polish Government's claims that the Jewish problem was a product of objective economic factors, a condition which Jabotinsky had labelled the 'anti-Semitism of things'. Jabotinsky was also fundamentally willing to concede the right of other governments to demand additional outlets for Jewish emigration.

A significant stumbling block initially for the NZO was Polish insistence that Palestine occupied only a minor role in the search for extensive territories for Jewish settlement. The Foreign Minister, Beck, in a speech in June 1937, expressed the view that the centre of gravity of Jewish emigration lay in other territories and not in Palestine.¹⁷ Dr Jan Wagner, Deputy Head of the Department for Emigration Policy in the Consular Department of the Foreign Ministry, was of the opinion that Palestine alone would not be able to solve the Jewish problem and that it was therefore necessary to seek other territories.¹⁸

On 12 May 1938, Schechtman met Beck to discuss the NZO's international conference idea and seek an accommodation on this point. In exchange for the NZO's concession not to exclude realistic possibilities of Jewish emigration to countries other than Palestine, Schechtman sought a corresponding shift in the Polish position on Palestine. In the semi-official communiqué of the interview, released by Iskra, the news agency, and also given coverage in *Gazeta Polska*, the Polish Foreign Ministry journal, Schechtman announced that interest in a solution to the Jewish problem would naturally lead to an effort to

¹⁵ Uriel Halperin, 'HaTeshuba HaYechida LaTerritorialism Haltalki', *Tel Hai*, 10 March 1938, p. 3.

¹⁶ Joseph Schechtman, 'HaVeeda HaBeinleumit LePitron Sheelat HaYehudim', *HaSchachar*, 18 March 1938, p. 5.

¹⁷ Joseph Marcus, *Social and Political History of the Jews in Poland, 1919–1939*, Berlin, 1983, p. 397 (hereafter Marcus).

¹⁸ Zionews, 15 April 1938, p. 8.

centre Jewish migration on Palestine. He hastened to add, however, that the NZO did not rule out serious discussion of the problem of migration to other countries.¹⁹ At the conclusion of his talks Schechtman informed the Nessiut, the NZO's presidium, that the Poles had moved away from the idea that Jewish emigration was to be directed predominantly to countries other than Palestine.²⁰

A week after the Schechtman interview, the Polish Government's Camp of National Unity, the Ozon, released the 'Thirteen Theses', a thirteen-paragraph special resolution concerning the Jews, which was the strongest anti-Jewish pronouncement issued by a Polish government to date. Although acts of violence against Jews were condemned, the Jews were deemed to be a hindrance to Polish national aspirations, an element with separate national aims whose participation in all branches of economic activity had to be reduced. Mass Jewish emigration was recommended. Here, however, there was a marked departure from all previous Polish policy statements on record: 'Being well disposed to the idea of building a Jewish state in Palestine, we declare simultaneously that this country should be recognized as the main direction of Jewish emigration'.²¹

The NZO was well aware that its policy would lay it open to much criticism. Schechtman's explanation of his statement on Jewish emigration to a correspondent of *Moment*, the Warsaw Yiddish newspaper, was an exercise in rationalization.

It would be impossible diplomatically to demand that this conference [the conference proposed by the NZO] focus only on the Palestine question. Palestine in its capacity as an international possession is under the jurisdiction of the League of Nations. States belonging to the League of Nations would not be able to participate in an international body which came to 'compete' as it were with the League of Nations' prerogative over Palestine as a country under Mandate.

But an international conference which would deal with all possibilities of emigration would not invite such reservations. Such a conference would discuss in a serious way various emigration schemes which have been drawing attention for years and it will most probably expose their fallaciousness and concentrate on the only tangible thing: Palestine. Palestine can only profit from such an open and substantive discussion 'of other emigration possibilities'.²²

¹⁹ Memorandum from the Federation Department to the Zionist Executive Regarding Revisionist Activity in Poland, 3 June 1938, Central Zionist Archives (CZA), Jerusalem, S53/501 D.

²⁰ Report of the Nessiut at the Party Council Session, Warsaw, 17 September 1938, JA, 3/1-4 G.

²¹ Marcus, pp. 379, 398.

²² Memorandum from the Federation Department to the Zionist Executive Regarding Revisionist Activity in Poland, 3 June 1938, CZA, S53/501 D.

The NZO press also sought to contain and dampen the controversy as much as possible. Joseph Klarman, the editor of the NZO weekly, *Unser Welt*, justified the NZO's willingness to consider other territories by reverting to the argument that all roads would lead to Palestine.²³ Schechtman attempted to deflect charges that he was advocating wholesale liquidation of the Diaspora. The bulk of Jews would continue to reside in the Diaspora. Schechtman described Palestine as a country which would absorb waves of normal emigration with the Jewish population in the Diaspora remaining at about seventy per cent, a situation paralleling the German and Irish condition throughout the world. Within this context he portrayed the Poles' Jewish problem as similar to that of Diasporas of normal nations.²⁴

The close ties which the NZO succeeded in developing with the Polish Foreign Ministry were regarded by ZO officials as significant enough to constitute a stumbling block in their own relations with the Poles. They had no doubt that the Polish Foreign Ministry was using the NZO to prove that there was a Jewish party which totally supported the official Government position on emigration. In their view, the Government was using the talk of grandiose schemes for Jewish emigration as a means of deflecting attention from the actual emigration figures, which were paltry, and to stem the growing tide of anti-Semitism.²⁵

The NZO's strategy in cultivating the Poles was based on the misconception that Britain felt itself bound to consult with nations such as Poland before determining immigration schedules for Palestine. Benjamin Akzin, the member of the executive elected to the post of external political affairs at the Prague Conference, when meeting with Murray, Alling and Childs (of the Division of Near Eastern Affairs at the State Department) on 25 October 1937, had made just this point. The NZO also brought news of this arrangement to the attention of other countries in Central Europe such as Romania, Austria and Czechoslovakia, so that they might make similar arrangements. Akzin believed that pressure applied by these countries would result in a considerable increase of immigration into Palestine.²⁶ Schechtman also mistakenly pointed to consultations between Eden and representatives of Poland and Romania on immigration to Palestine and stated that Eden did not negate their right to intervene collectively.²⁷ In fact, all

²³ Joseph Klarman, 'Alle Vegen Firin Kein Eretz Yisrael', *Unser Welt*, 20 May 1938.

²⁴ Schechtman, 'Chisul HaGalut', *HaYarden*, 6 May 1938, p. 4.

²⁵ Letter from Yitchak Gruenbaum to Nahum Goldmann, 11 August 1938, CZA, L 22/194/1; Yehuda Gotholf (ed.), *Itonut Yehudit Shehayta*, Halgud HaOlami shel Haltonim HaYehudim, Tel Aviv, 1973, pp. 96–110.

²⁶ Partition of Palestine and its Relation to European Problems, Conversation between Murray, Alling, Childs and Akzin of 25 October 1937, NA, 867B.01/959.

²⁷ Joseph Schechtman, 'HaVeeda HaBeinleumit LePitron Sheelat HaYehudim', *HaSchachar*, 18 March 1938, p. 5.

that Britain had communicated to the Poles was a willingness to hear their views.²⁸

The Zionist Executive's understanding was that such intercessions antagonized Britain. Menachem Kahany, a member of the Jewish Agency delegation attached to the League at Geneva, was briefed by Tadeusz Gwiadowski, the Deputy Director of the Political Department of the Foreign Ministry and Head of the League of Nations Department, about talks held with Rendel in February 1938 on increased immigration to Palestine. The Poles had raised the issue of Jewish immigration to Transjordan and were told that it had been excluded from the boundaries of the Jewish National Home. Rendel at that time hinted strongly that Britain did not take kindly to Polish interventions. Such matters were viewed as a strictly internal affair falling within the jurisdiction of the British Colonial Office.²⁹

The strategy employed by the Political Department of the NZO in the period after the Prague Convention was to avoid generating a hostile reaction to the international conference idea from Great Britain. Palestine, deemed a sensitive topic, was not focused on by the NZO but raised in passing during talks with representatives from various states. The aim was to convince those interested that their support would not be construed as a hostile act by Britain.

Poland occupied centre stage in the NZO's political work. Polish advice and suggestions to other governments proved invaluable. When in February 1938 the NZO began its search for an appropriate state which would sponsor the conference, Schechtman held a series of meetings with Polish officials with the aim of having Poland assist in suggesting the conference to other states. Political activity in London was channelled by Benjamin Akzin through the Polish Legation there.³⁰

The Poles and the NZO continued to diverge, however, over the ability of Palestine to serve as a solution to the problem. Poland's determination to concentrate efforts on a settlement of the Palestine question was motivated by a desire to begin its own vigorous search for alternative emigration outlets. Beck believed that so long as Jews focused their attentions on Palestine it would be impossible to enlist their support for alternative territories. But while Beck considered the time inopportune for active investigation of other sites, he none the less felt that no time should be lost in making surveys covering all possible international outlets and potential financial accommodations to cover

²⁸ NA, 867N.01/981.

²⁹ Kahany's Report to the Jewish Agency Executive on Conversation with Gwiadowski and Talks held by Polish Representatives with the British at Geneva about Palestine, CZA, L/22/194.

³⁰ Report of the Nessiut at the Party Council Session, Warsaw, 17 September 1938, JA, 3/1-43G.

emigration. In that way when the time became propitious, émigrés could speedily be distributed according to economic, climatic and other conditions prevailing in the case of each potential outlet.

The ability to offer alternative proposals to Jewish leaders was viewed by Beck as a boon serving to raise the spirits after Jews realized that Palestine would not meet the needs of future Jewish population expansion. ‘Even though at first no concrete results might thus have been attained, evidence of such effort might serve to instil Jews with hope and thus replace the potentially dangerous effect of currently increasing despondency over their dismal outlook.’³¹

It was the danger of a territorialist scenario, such as the Poles enunciated, ultimately emerging which sparked fears within the Zionist Executive. Ben-Gurion warned that using interested states such as Poland to put pressure on Britain would be damaging. Poland would not quarrel with Britain over Palestine. For the Poles to quarrel with Britain over Jews would be viewed by British public opinion as a case of pogromists preaching morality. Only interventions by countries which did not have a direct interest in expelling Jews such as Norway, Sweden and Holland would be of any moral and political value. Poland’s intervention would have a detrimental effect.³²

The NZO Offensive for an International Conference

The NZO offensive for an international conference was formally unveiled as a reaction to the expected recommendations of the Woodhead Commission. Although the Commission’s Report was not officially published until November, details were leaked earlier; the NZO was aware that partition was to be declared unimplementable and immigration restrictions imposed. On 10 October 1938, Jabotinsky, Schechtman and Henryk Strassman (the leader of the Polish NZO) met with Miroslaw Arciszewski, the Deputy Foreign Minister, Michael Lubienski, the Director of the Office of the Foreign Minister, Gwiadowski and Wagner, and presented them with a memorandum.

Jabotinsky argued that what was needed was an effective means of revising the imminent decision of the British Government. Such a plan also had to channel constructively the explosion of disappointment and moral upheaval of those directly affected, the Jewish masses in the ghettos, eager to emigrate to Palestine. He proposed that the Poles approach the US with an offer for a joint initiative, the convocation of an international conference during the winter of 1938–39. Jabotinsky regarded the US as the partner most suited for such a joint venture because of President Roosevelt’s initiation of the Evian Conference,

³¹ Telegram of 30 August 1938, NA, 840.48 Refugees/707.

³² Protocols of the Agency Executive, 26 June 1938, BGA; David Ben-Gurion, *Zichronot*, v. 5, 1938, Am Oved, Tel Aviv, 1982, pp. 219–20.

convened in Evian, France, in July 1938, to facilitate the emigration of refugees from Germany and Austria. Jabotinsky asked the Poles to put pressure on Britain directly, intercede with the US to act likewise and support Jewish protest actions. The Jews for their part would bring the influence of American Jewry to bear and would call elections for an extraordinary Congress to present their demands at the conference.

During the discussion, Gwiadowski cautioned the NZO against expecting too much. It was essential to lobby Britain in order to influence Parliament; moreover, the US would not consent to such a conference without the agreement of the British Government. Lubienski, addressing himself to tactics, regarded the international conference idea being put forward, prior to the decision on Palestine, as constituting an effective threat to Britain. As for Poland, it required a quick decision one way or the other on the fate of Palestine, and this would determine any further action on its part. An official reply to the NZO's proposals was promised.

In an aide-mémoire on Jewish emigration,³³ Jabotinsky outlined the envisaged chain of events: the crux of the plan centred on Poland. The Poles and, eventually, other governments were to be urged to approach the US Government while at the same time a Jewish delegation would be dispatched to Washington. Their purpose was to press the US to agree to a 'Congress of Governments' to find a territorial solution to the world problem of Jewish migrations. Such a Congress was to be convened during the winter of 1938–39.

The agenda was as follows: Palestine was to be the first order of business, with a Palestine Emergency Scheme to be implemented in which one million Jews were to be settled in one to three years. Under the terms of the scheme an international commission to assist the mandatory and advise the Jewish colonizing authority was to be set up. A rough plan for the initial employment of settlers was to be prepared. An international loan, which was to be coupled with an internal Jewish loan and guaranteed by Palestine's custom revenue, was to be floated. A Jewish garrison composed of trained ex-soldiers was to be formed. Prior to implementation, a World Jewish National Assembly would have to be convoked in order to form the colonizing authority and raise funds.³⁴

As a precursor to the conference the NZO wanted to convene a Congress of Eastern European Jewry. On 16 October Joseph Schechtman issued a press statement to this effect:

³³ Aide-mémoire presented by NZO, Warsaw, 10 October 1938; Minutes of Meeting with Jabotinsky, 10 October 1938, JA, 5/31–4G, also in Jerzy Tomaszewski, 'Vladimir Jabotinsky's Talks with Representatives of the Polish Government', *Polin*, 1988, 3, pp. 278–82 (hereafter *Polin*).

³⁴ Aide-mémoire on Jewish Emigration given to Biddle by Jabotinsky and Talk with him, 15 October 1938, NA, 840.48 Refugees/848.

The NZO has decided to convene a Special Congress of Eastern European Jewry to represent six million Jews faced with expulsion. The Congress, based on the free general franchise of all the Jewish population, will consist of representatives of Poland, Romania, Czechoslovakia and the neighbouring countries. It would take place in Warsaw under the slogan: 'the whole of Palestine for the Jews in our time'. It would demand the convening of an International Conference for the creation of a Jewish State.³⁵

The immigration figure the NZO contemplated was one million in one year. Jabotinsky reasoned that the original Ten-Year Plan which called for an annual immigration to Palestine was no longer adequate, given the rapidly worsening condition of Jews in East-Central Europe. He wrote:

Under present conditions statesmen fear thinking for [the] long term and want answers to immediate problems. A plan which demands ten years or so before the Jews become a majority [in Palestine] and the British are rid of responsibility stands no chance in this psychological atmosphere. But [the immigration into Palestine of] one million in one year, I very seriously think that a Nordau Plan³⁶ will soon be accepted as England's and the world's policy for Palestine.

Elemental floods will soon break out all over East European Jewry, so terribly powerful that the German [Jewish] catastrophe will be eclipsed, that all twaddle about palliative charities will be swept away, all twaddle about Guiana etc. [proposed as a territory for mass Jewish immigration] dropped as inadequate, all Arab fury 'in den Schatten gestellt' [overshadowed] as something infinitesimally puny and then one thing will emerge as consensus omnium, 'a Jewish majority overnight' ... The only thing of which I am not sure is whether the Jews will prove able properly to play the role of sage-femme [midwife] in this elemental birth-process, thus shortening the process and lessening the pain ... But the march of events is so ensured by G-d himself that it will end in the 'Judenstaat' [Jewish State] independently of what we Jews do or don't do.³⁷

The Poles expressed reservations about the NZO's plan. They informed Jabotinsky that while willing to support the idea of a conference they felt that at the first stage efforts should concentrate on lobbying the American Jewish community in relation to the US Government. The extent to which Palestine would be considered would depend on the state of the Palestine issue and the readiness of the British to discuss the problem outside of the League of Nations.

³⁵ *Zionews*, 1, 21 October 1938, p. 6.

³⁶ A plan proposed by Zionist leader Max Nordau in 1920, calling for the immediate transfer of 600,000 Jews into Palestine, thereby creating a Jewish majority overnight.

³⁷ Letter from Jabotinsky to Dr Felix Danziger, 29 November 1938, JA, 1/28/2/1A.

Discussion of the emigration plan to be put before such a conference by the NZO was premature.³⁸

Responding to the Resurgence of Territorialism

By the autumn of 1938 the Polish Government was not only failing to promote Jewish emigration, it was actually allowing more Jews in, as a result of German dumping of stateless Jews over the frontier, and the forced repatriation of Jews resident in Germany who possessed Polish citizenship. Political elements on the right pressed the Government to take more extreme measures to force an accelerated Jewish emigration. The Government, in turn, put pressure on the Jews publicly to declare support for and finance efforts aimed at Jewish emigration.

In November 1938 it approached leading Jewish figures, including two major Zionist leaders, Moshe Schorr and Henryk Rosmarin, and encouraged them to found the Committee for Jewish Colonization Affairs, also known as the Schorr Committee after its chairman. The Committee was assigned several tasks: chief among them, it sought to convince the London-based Intergovernmental Committee on Refugees to include the problem of Jewish emigration from Poland within its purview or risk an outbreak of violent anti-Semitism in that country. It also maintained ties with Daniel Wolf, a wealthy businessman from the Hague with dealings in Poland, who was actively involved in emigration schemes for Polish Jews. The Committee was also enjoined to organize chapters throughout the country and announce a fund-raising campaign with the aim of collecting three million zloty for the purpose of organizing Jewish emigration from Poland.

The Polish authorities simultaneously encouraged the creation of two other organizations, the Committee for the Advancement of Jewish Colonization in Madagascar and Kenya, and the Committee for the Encouragement of Emigration of the Jews of Poland to Africa and Australia. The establishment of bodies designed to foster Jewish settlement outside of Palestine and competing with the ZO for funds evoked an outcry in Zionist circles.

All Zionists were in a quandary. The authorities were pressing major Jewish and Zionist bodies to participate in the Schorr Committee. A comparison of the NZO's position with that of Poalei Zion, the Palestine Labour Party's European counterpart, reveals some significant differences. Leaders of Poalei Zion, after being briefed at the Polish Foreign Ministry, all agreed that they would oppose the new Government policy. All regarded the Schorr Committee as an attempt by the Government to endow its policy with an imprimatur of international respectability by being able to point to Jewish co-operation. At

³⁸ Draft for a verbal reply to the Chairman of the NZO, Mr Jabotinsky, JA, 5/31-4G, also in *Polin*, pp. 283-84.

a meeting of the party leadership the consensus was that only if the Government simultaneously advocated equal rights for Jews could they support the emigration effort.

The majority advocated restrained opposition and cautioned against an outright confrontation with the Government in the belief that the latter was not of one mind; its pressures would soon decrease and the matter would then recede into the background. The initiative for the Committee emanated from the Foreign Ministry and did not command the support of either the Minister for Social Affairs or the Ministry of the Interior, in the Poalei Zion leadership's view. Government moves were merely a bluff and it was believed that the authorities would be satisfied with merely maintaining appearances that some action had been taken and not proceed further. By withholding Zionist backing of the Committee it would remain without much influence and prestige, and be condemned to obscurity as yet another failed Foreign Ministry scheme. By maintaining a low profile and not raising the level of polemic, the Government would be able to retreat without too much difficulty.³⁹

At the urging of the Polish Government, the Committee for Jewish Colonization Affairs dispatched a memorandum to the Intergovernmental Committee for Refugees which was convening in London in January 1939. The Committee demanded that countries reopen emigration outlets to Polish immigrants, find places also outside of Palestine able to absorb emigrants, and recognize that emigration was an international problem.

Representatives of the various Zionist Central Committees of the Zionist parties from the Jewish State Party on the right, the religious Zionists, through to Shomer HaTzair on the left, expressed their unalterable opposition to and complete dissociation from the Committee for Jewish Colonization Affairs. The Zionist parties affirmed:

that the lack of a homeland for the Jewish people could find its solution only by establishing a Jewish homeland in Palestine which was also the only country in which real and extensive Jewish settlement was possible.

The undersigned federations turn to the Jewish public in Poland with a call to concentrate all their energies and efforts in the war for the right of the Jewish people to its national home, for mass immigration to Palestine, the strengthening of the national funds for the upbuilding of Palestine. This war which is for the full realization of Zionism is of necessity tied to the war for full civil and national rights of Jewish education in Poland and against all proposals for displacement and forced emigration.⁴⁰

³⁹ Anschel Reiss, *BeSa'arot HaTekufah*, Am Oved, Tel Aviv, 1982, pp. 177–86; Emanuel Melzer, *Maavak Medini BeMalkotet Yehudei Polin, 1935–1939*, The Diaspora Research Institute, Tel Aviv, 1982, p. 328 (hereafter Melzer, *Maavak*).

⁴⁰ *HaOlam*, 19 May 1939; Reiss, pp. 187–88; Memorandum from Baruch Zuckerman to Stephen Wise on the Jewish Emigration Committee, 19 January 1939, CZA, A243/119.

Notable by its absence was the NZO. Among Zionists it was only the NZO and the Et Livnot, the extreme wing of the Group B General Zionists, who did not oppose the new territorialist ventures. In the case of the NZO it was not its separate status which prevented it from making common cause with the ZO; it was effectively constrained from censuring Polish initiatives by its policy of condoning the search for other territories. The lack of any overt response belied the vigorous internal debate wracking the movement.

Schechtman, when meeting with Government officials, was pressed for active NZO participation in the workings of the Schorr Committee. In his talks he requested that the Schorr Committee make mention of Palestine in its declaration. Schechtman was of the opinion that the NZO had to send representatives, and that any opposition to the Committee would be viewed as disloyal by the Government. He proposed drafting a letter announcing that the NZO was sending representatives who would fight for emigration to Palestine and participate in emigration work to other countries.

Opponents charged that it was one thing to put forward such a platform when conducting negotiations with the Government, and quite another to send representatives whose only task would be to send Jews to Palestine and other countries. Moreover, no other Zionist parties were participating and Zionists who took part did so as individuals. The Zionist press in Poland and Jewish public opinion would attack this territorialist experiment, with the NZO being the first to be excoriated. The Government would no doubt engineer the workings of the Committee, and the NZO would be forced to concur with the official line. For ideological reasons, the NZO could not endorse a territorialism which did not declare for a Jewish majority anywhere in the world but was intent upon creating new diasporas where the same problem of anti-Semitism would arise. Opponents favoured embarking on a crusade against this latest manifestation.

The chairman of the Nessiut in Poland, Joseph Szofman, felt that the movement had to throw in its lot with the territorialists or else forfeit its public position and end up politically inactive. He held out the option of receiving funding from the Committee for the NZO's illegal immigration effort of smuggling Polish Jews into Palestine. Opponents countered that funds for this purpose could probably be obtained from the Committee even without the NZO's participation.⁴¹

Subsequently, the movement in Poland split into competing camps, with leading NZO figures, Joseph Klarman, Shmuel Merlin and David Movshovitz, opposed to active involvement. Nessiut leaders in Poland, Joseph Szofman, Johanan Bader and Israel-Menahem Eigler, officially

⁴¹ Letter from Yehuda Benari to Jabotinsky, 28 November 1938, JA, Benari File, 38 P.

endorsed participation.⁴² Jabotinsky took Szofman's side in the controversy. It soon became apparent that the London Nessiut was permitting NZO leaders, Speyer in Holland, and Szofman and Spektor in Poland, to participate in territorialist schemes. While the leaders proclaimed that they were operating in a private capacity, this disclaimer did not prove very convincing, since they viewed themselves and were perceived by others to be representatives of the NZO. One member of the Warsaw Nessiut, Levi Yungster, who headed Achdut Israel (the NZO's youth organization for orthodox youth), resigned in protest.⁴³

The NZO was viewed in Zionist circles as the only Jewish body supporting the Government line. Whereas other Jewish groups such as the ultra-orthodox Jewish party Agudat Israel and Group B of the General Zionists did not oppose the Government, their reason for not doing so was perceived as deriving from a basic philosophy of 'shtadlanut'. In other words, they were committed to co-operate with the regime, hope for the best, and work to stave off the imposition of more severe decrees and the accession of a worse regime.⁴⁴ The NZO's relationship with the Government went beyond perfunctory representations before official Polish bodies.

Laying the Groundwork for the Zion-Sejm

Jabotinsky remained confident that the NZO would prove successful despite the emergence of a territorialist scenario in Polish circles. This prognosis was based on his perception that Jewish emigration was vital for the Polish Government and Poland was of primary importance for British decision-makers. In Jabotinsky's view, the onus for finding a territory for Poland's Jews fell on Britain because it possessed colonies and had a moral obligation to find a home for the Jewish people. The latter point was enunciated in the Balfour Declaration. Jabotinsky maintained that the British would continue to claim that a territory other than Palestine could be found for Jewish emigration but no place would be found for mass immigration within the British Empire.

In Jabotinsky's analysis, Poland occupied the position of a great world power with a pivotal role in the European equilibrium. It commanded as much weight for Britain as the US and France. The NZO was to press Poland 'to explain to the British Government that its Palestine policy deriving from fear of annoying the small states around Palestine causes much greater annoyance, one hundred times as much in a state one hundred percent more important'.⁴⁵ Jabotinsky's optimism was fuelled by the perception that Poland had abandoned its interest in the scattered

⁴² Letter from Jabotinsky to Levi Yungster, December 1938, JA, 2/28/2/1 A.

⁴³ Letter from Benari to Jabotinsky, 15 December 1938, JA, Yehuda Benari File, 38 P.

⁴⁴ Report on the Condition of Jews in Poland, 1939–1942, CZA, S46/275.

⁴⁵ Letter from Jabotinsky to Schechtman, 28 February 1939, JA, 1/29/2/1 A.

settlement of Jews. Beck, when discussing the Jewish question, made the point that all territorial investigations on behalf of Jewish emigrants could not result in a re-dispersion among the countries. An area had to be found where the Jews could be granted sovereign powers. Jabotinsky considered this demand as tantamount to a proposal that Britain cede territory and calculated that it would force Britain back to Palestine as the only solution.⁴⁶

Polish representations to the British and the Americans bore out Jabotinsky's contention that a consensus existed on the need for the concentrated settlement of Jews. It was premature, however, to posit that the search for supplemental territories was in any way to be abandoned even if positive results were not forthcoming. The Ambassador to London, Edward Raczyński, in a detailed report to Beck in December 1938 on his numerous talks with British officials, railed that there was no real movement on the question of available territories. While the Poles recognized the need for a territory where the Jewish settlers would eventually become the majority and the British accepted this point, Raczyński was pessimistic about the outcome. None the less, he continued to leave no stone unturned in the search for territories.⁴⁷

In Washington, the Ambassador, Jerzy Potocki, held talks with Roosevelt, presenting the Polish view of Palestine as a national home and urging the quickest possible resolution of the question. The reason he adduced, however, was so that Jewish emigration to other territories could then be considered. His discussions revolved around the possibility of large-scale Jewish settlement in Angola and the creation there of a 'Supplemental Jewish Homeland'.⁴⁸ The only comfort for Zionists was that in the light of its repeated territorialist failures the Polish Government was adopting a cautious stance. At the first stage it wanted the initiative to come from American Jewry and only after the support of the US and Britain was obtained would it commit itself.⁴⁹

In view of the above, Jabotinsky's unshaken belief that any attempt to solve the Jewish problem through concentrated territorial settlement would have to fall back on Palestine constituted a Zionist leap of faith. It also presupposed that the Jews could afford to wait until the entire process played itself out. When drawing up a policy paper on future NZO diplomatic activity, Jabotinsky based it on the premise that in Europe a period of relative *détente* would set in, thereby allowing

⁴⁶ *Jewish Herald*, 6 April 1939, p. 1.

⁴⁷ Emanuel Melzer, 'HaDiplomatis HaPolanit VeHaHagira HaYehudit Be-1935–1939', *Gal-Ed*, I, 1973, pp. 226–27.

⁴⁸ 'Meeting of Potocki with Roosevelt, November 2, 1938 (Appendix 2)', in Emanuel Melzer, 'Poland, the U.S. and the Emigration of Eastern European Jewry — The Plan for a Supplemental Jewish Homeland in Angola, 1938–1939', *Gal-Ed*, xi, 1989, pp. 82–83.

⁴⁹ 'Draft of cable from Beck to the Polish Embassy in Washington, November 9, 1938 (Appendix 3)', *ibid.*, pp. 85–86.

political work. He awaited the reports of the commissions of inquiry sent to investigate the possibilities of Jewish colonization in British Guiana, Rhodesia and various other territories, convinced that all of them would acknowledge that no adequate solution to the problem of Jewish migration could be undertaken without utilizing the capacity of Palestine to the maximum. His vision was of a second Evian Conference, convoked to evaluate the reports' conclusions. Unlike the first, it would have states in need of Jewish emigration participating, and would deal with the entire problem of Jewish migration, with Palestine included as one of the countries cited for immigration. Jabotinsky hoped to press for a provisional condominium of several Powers over Palestine consisting of Poland, Romania and the United States. At the Conference, the NZO intended to present the Max Nordau Plan for rapid colonization.⁵⁰

Before the NZO could presume to represent Eastern European Jewry's migration needs it required a mandate from those masses. Jabotinsky advocated the election of a Zion-Sejm, or Parliament of Zion for East-European Jewry as best providing the NZO with the formal legitimization it needed. He envisaged the mass voting device of millions signing a declaration empowering the NZO to represent their interests, carried out with the support and encouragement of the various governments, with Poland as sponsor.⁵¹ He also believed that a massive outpouring of Jewish support for the Zion-Sejm idea in Poland, Romania and Hungary would provide the governments of those countries with the necessary moral and political wherewithal for tackling the Jewish problem.⁵²

Subsequently, Jabotinsky began promoting the Zion-Sejm throughout Eastern Europe. In Poland, he campaigned vigorously in the cities of Vilna and Warsaw for the idea. The date when elections could be held was yet to be decided. Jabotinsky resolved to postpone the announcement until after the elections for the forthcoming Zionist Congress were concluded.⁵³

Jabotinsky set two conditions for proceeding with the Zion-Sejm: the ability to recruit a cadre of young intelligentsia who would also serve as Sejm delegates, and the need for an operating capital of several million zloty. While it would have been most beneficial to secure official Polish recognition at the outset, Jabotinsky was willing to press ahead, not considering it absolutely essential during the first stage.⁵⁴ Crucial if the Zion-Sejm was to have any chance of success was the motivation of the

⁵⁰ Aide-mémoire proposition of Jabotinsky, 1 April 1939, JA, 1/5–4G.

⁵¹ Letter from Jabotinsky to the NZO in London, 16 April 1939, JA, 1/29/2/1 A.

⁵² Aide-mémoire proposition of Jabotinsky, 1 April 1939, JA, 1/5–4G.

⁵³ Letter from Jabotinsky to the NZO in London, 8 May 1939, JA, 1/29/2/1 A.

⁵⁴ Letter from Jabotinsky to London Nessiut, 26 May 1939, JA, 1/29/2/1 A.

masses. Jabotinsky soon discovered that such enthusiasm was lacking. 'As to Sejm itself, I can now say that its only enemy is the incredible, cheerful indifference of Eastern European Jewry to all that happens.'⁵⁵ The Jews were, 'strikingly apathetic . . . they behave as if they were chloroformed'. Jabotinsky's analysis of the reason was: 'the undeniable "baisse" of active anti-Semitism in Poland, Romania and Balticum. It will prove as short-lived as it is undeniable, and, as the fear of war recedes, a violent revival of Jew-baiting is nearing: but for the present there is a breathing space. Of course nobody doubts that it is only a provisorium.'⁵⁶

Ultimately, Polish endorsement was essential for carrying out the Zion-Sejm elections. There was the rub. The Polish Government, preoccupied in the spring of 1939 with the Polish-German crisis and dependent on its major ally, Great Britain, was not going to endorse the NZO scheme enthusiastically. Jabotinsky began to doubt the feasibility of convening the Zion-Sejm at a time when Poland's relationship with Britain was increasingly determined by its need for aid from the latter for its survival.⁵⁷

None the less, after deliberations among Nessiut members in London the decision was made to go ahead. Jabotinsky prepared a draft on the Zion-Sejm and held talks with Polish officials in a bid to gain their endorsement. The NZO presented a summary of its progress to date. From its talks with the Romanian Government the NZO expected that it would be permitted to function in that country. The Hungarians seemed to make their consent conditional on acceptance of the plan by the Polish Government.

The *sine qua non* of the whole enterprise is an open attitude of good will on the part of the Polish Government. The Jews . . . know from many recent examples that for a government resolved to insist on a certain policy mass demonstrations are considered a powerful help. Without official backing a call for Zion-Sejm elections would hardly arouse all the necessary attention. Backed by clear knowledge that the Zion-Sejm is to be an essential factor in the concerted policy of influential governments, it will sweep Jewish multitudes as no other Jewish election has ever done.⁵⁸

For such backing to be effective, it had to be expressed in open official statements. The NZO wanted assurances that the Polish Government would recognize the Zion-Sejm as the main advisory body in all matters concerning Palestine. It wanted Government backing of the effort, including technical assistance with carrying out the elections, and diplomatic support for Eastern European Jewry's claim to Palestine

⁵⁵ Letter from Jabotinsky to London Nessiut, 20–22 May 1939, JA, 1/29/2/1 A.

⁵⁶ Letter from Jabotinsky to Haskel, 5 June 1939, JA, 1/29/2/1 A.

⁵⁷ Letter from Jabotinsky to Schechtman, 22 December 1938, JA, 1/28/2/1 A.

⁵⁸ Draft Memorandum to the Polish Government on the Zion-Sejm, 1938, JA, 1/28/2/1 A.

before all allied nations. The NZO also sought a commitment that the Zion-Sejm would in no way be used to the detriment of Polish Jewry in the realm of internal policy.⁵⁹

The NZO's strongest supporter in diplomatic circles, Michael Lubienski, Cabinet Chief of the Foreign Ministry, tried to sound encouraging and advised that if the concept of the Zion-Sejm became widely popular some form of preliminary official acknowledgement might become possible.⁶⁰ When the NZO consulted Lubienski about mentioning the Polish Government in their manifesto on the Zion-Sejm, however, it discovered that there were Polish objections to such a move. To Jabotinsky it seemed that the growing closeness between the Polish and British Governments as a result of the German crisis had adversely affected relations. The easy access NZO leaders had to Lubienski was also becoming a thing of the past.⁶¹

Jabotinsky held talks with Antoni Paprocki, Councillor in the Consular Department of the Foreign Ministry, and tried to impress upon him that once the threat of a military conflict faded Polish public opinion would again focus on the Jewish socio-economic question. This renewed interest would be accompanied by a resurgence of anti-Semitism which could be effectively countered by a Parliament of Zion of two million Jews declaring their willingness to emigrate. Such a demonstration would also provide Poland with cogent arguments in its dealings with Britain.⁶²

When considering the issue internally, the Foreign Ministry acknowledged the propaganda advantages of Polish Jewry agitating in favour of emigration and Palestine, but maintained that, given political conditions, it was of no practical value. The idea also contained several inherent dangers. If the Parliament of Zion were unsuccessful, not only would the NZO be compromised but also the very idea that Polish Jews would be willing to emigrate, would be compromised.

A key consideration for the Poles was the search for other territories for emigration and in this respect the NZO proposal, which concentrated solely on Palestine, went contrary to their interests. The Poles also feared that even tacit support by the administrative authorities would sooner or later become known, given the NZO's reputation for indiscretion. Those Jews antagonistic to Jabotinsky would then register their displeasure.

Propaganda for mass emigration to Palestine also threatened to provoke public discussion on the subject of illegal immigration which

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Letter from Jabotinsky to London Nessiut, 16 May 1939, JA, 1/29/2/1 A.

⁶¹ Letters from Jabotinsky to London Nessiut, 6, 7, 9 June 1939, JA, 1/29/2/1 A.

⁶² Report by Antoni Paprocki of a Conversation with Jabotinsky, 9 June 1939, JA, 5/31-4 G, also in *Polin*, pp. 288–89.

was already the subject of diplomatic interventions by the British Government. The result could well be the opposite of what was intended. Instead of increasing emigration there might be a reduction in illegal immigration if the Poles under pressure from the British were forced to impose restrictive measures.⁶³ This point had been a matter of continuing concern for Jabotinsky. He feared that the British would endeavour to enlist Polish collaboration to stop illegal immigration into Palestine.⁶⁴ The position of the Colonial Office, in response to Polish demands that it help solve its Jewish problem, was in fact that Poland had first to co-operate with Britain in curbing the traffic in illegal immigration from its own territory.⁶⁵

When seeking clarifications on the Polish position on the Zion-Sejm from Lubienski, the NZO was told that Government objections to the Zion-Sejm derived from fear that it might prove a failure and Polish prestige would then be damaged.⁶⁶ The NZO attempted to elucidate whether the aloofness towards the NZO derived from Polish disappointment with Zionism and Palestine as a solution to the Jewish problem. It discovered that a similar loss of confidence had not occurred toward the ZO.⁶⁷ The lack of faith exhibited toward the Zion-Sejm idea to a great degree reflected a loss of confidence in the NZO itself. When the authorities lent their support to Jabotinsky they hoped he would succeed in weakening the liberal, democratically-oriented oppositional elements within the Jewish camp, thereby serving their right-wing, nationalist interests. This had not occurred. The range of influence of the NZO proved rather limited. A memorandum drawn up in the Consular Department of the Foreign Ministry in January 1938 reported that: 'The NZO has still not gained very significant influence amongst Polish Jews although the Polish authorities are favorably inclined towards this group. At present militant Jewish nationalism finds greater understanding among the Poles than amongst Jews.'⁶⁸ Beck concurred that the NZO had not fulfilled the hopes placed in it and did not merit a massive expenditure of funds.⁶⁹

Moreover, the NZO also fostered an image of unreliability. In competition with the ZO in its dealings with the authorities, it attempted to create the illusion that it was a powerful, financially solvent body which needed to be reckoned with. This transparency was quickly

⁶³ Memorandum for the Minister Concerning the Parliament of Zion, W. T. Drymmer, 10 June 1939, JA, 5/31-4 G, *ibid.*, pp. 289-90.

⁶⁴ *Aide-mémoire proposition of Jabotinsky*, 1 April 1939, JA, 1/5-4 G.

⁶⁵ Melzer, *Maavak*, pp. 346-47.

⁶⁶ Letter from Jabotinsky to Nessiut, 9 June 1939, JA, 1/29/2/1 A.

⁶⁷ Letter from Jabotinsky to NZO, London, 12 June 1939, JA, 1/29/2/1 A.

⁶⁸ *Polin*, pp. 276-78.

⁶⁹ Minutes of Meeting of the Director of the Consular Department with Minister Beck, JA, 5/31-4 G, also in *Polin*, pp. 284-85.

exposed. The NZO, after negotiating with the Poles for the purchase of a ship for use in illegal immigration, proved unable to underwrite the payments.⁷⁰ Jabotinsky was forced to admit to officials that the standard of work of the NZO's representatives in Poland was unsatisfactory, and in many cases detrimental to its popularity and to the principles he proclaimed.⁷¹

Consequently, the NZO ran into difficulty with the Polish Ministry of Interior in December 1938, when it sought entry and work permits for members it judged to be crucial to preparation for the Zion-Sejm elections. Dr Jan Wagner requested that the organization stop bringing in foreigners.⁷² When the Palestinian branch of the organization requested visas from the Polish Consulate in Tel Aviv it discovered that it was no longer accorded special treatment.⁷³ Representations by Polish NZO leaders, Szofman and Strassman, before Dr Apoloniusz Zarychta, Head of the Division for Emigration Policy, confirmed that a shift had occurred in the Polish position. Foreign citizens working in Poland on behalf of the NZO were no longer welcome; the organization was told it had to be satisfied with employing local Jews. The reason given was that the presence of foreign Jews operating politically and socially in Poland generated animosity among lower level bureaucrats.⁷⁴

In spite of these difficulties Jabotinsky, relying on reports from his colleagues in the field, especially from his secretary Isaac Remba, believed that the Zion-Sejm idea was gaining ground in public and could still be successful. He felt, however, that the NZO could not proceed without some kind of official support which either would not be secured or could be secured only in exchange for a long postponement.⁷⁵

At a meeting with Jan Wagner, the Polish Foreign Ministry's objections were spelled out to him in detail. Wagner was also highly critical of the NZO's conduct of illegal emigration from Poland to Palestine. He warned that if illegal emigration was openly propagated in the press and at meetings, the authorities would apply restrictions because of both internal laws and diplomatic intervention by Britain. There would be no point in supporting the effort if the NZO's methods

⁷⁰ Note from Antoni Paprocki, 3 April 1939; Note on Revisionist Attempts to Purchase the Pulaski, 16 May 1939, JA, 5/31–4 G, also in *Polin*, pp. 286, 287.

⁷¹ Report by Antoni Paprocki of a Conversation with Jabotinsky, 9 June 1939, JA, 5/31–4 G, also in *Polin*, pp. 288–89.

⁷² Letters from Jabotinsky to Schechtman, 13, 15 December 1938, JA, 1/28/2/1 A.

⁷³ Tel Aviv Consulate to the Eastern Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Regarding the Formal and Legal Treatment of Revisionists, 15 March 1939, JA, 5/31–4 G, also in *Polin*, pp. 285–86.

⁷⁴ Note from the Director of the Department of Emigration Policy, March 1939, JA, 5/31–4 G, also in *Polin*, p. 286.

⁷⁵ Letter from Jabotinsky to London Nessiut, 17 June 1939, JA, 1/29/2/1 A.

resulted in illegal emigration from Poland merely replacing legal emigration. The Poles viewed illegal emigration as advantageous only when it resulted in a larger number of Jews leaving than would otherwise be the case legally. The NZO's request for a greater subsidy for each illegal emigrant was denied.

In addition, Wagner speculated that the Parliament of Zion could easily arouse a wave of anti-Semitism and might provoke excesses at a time when they were least desired. Jabotinsky unsuccessfully sought to persuade him that a return of anti-Semitism was to be expected in any case, and that Jews would then be accused of being apathetic and doing nothing to solve the problem. The Parliament of Zion would clearly furnish proof that the Jews were aware of the need to solve the Jewish problem and that the lack of a solution was a consequence of British policy.⁷⁶

Members of the NZO's Nessiut from Poland and Palestine, Joseph Szofman and Arye Altman, persisted in the matter of Polish endorsement and pressed for an interview with their closest ally at the Foreign Ministry, Count Lubienski. They conferred with him on 19 June, at which time it was made clear to them that the NZO would have to postpone the Zion-Sejm elections until after the political crisis in Europe blew over.⁷⁷ As compensation for the postponement the NZO leadership wanted to obtain Government consent that it viewed the idea of the Zion-Sejm with favour. They sent a text of the proposed communiqué to Lubienski in the hope of securing Beck's approval, though realizing that the issue was immaterial given the postponement. They wanted a clear indication of whether the Poles could be mentioned in any future campaign.

At a meeting of the National Executive in Poland held on 22 June, the NZO set its sights on the spring of 1940 for the Zion-Sejm. Jabotinsky believed that the international crisis would peak in August or September and that international pressures would begin to weaken even before that. He hoped to time the start of pre-election propaganda and the date of elections with 'the beginning of the turning point in the external situation'.⁷⁸

In the mean while, the Poles were despairing of Palestine and becoming increasingly dependent upon a military alliance with the British to ward off the German threat. In a memorandum submitted to the British Foreign Office Raczyński cited the serious curbs placed on Jewish immigration into Palestine as part of the White Paper of May

⁷⁶ Notes from Talks between Jan Wagner and Jabotinsky, 14 June 1939, JA, 5/31-4 G, also in *Polin*, pp. 290-91.

⁷⁷ Letter from Jabotinsky to London Nessiut, 19 June 1939, JA, 1/29/2/1 A.

⁷⁸ Letter from Jabotinsky to Propes, 2 July 1939, JA, 1/29/2/1 A.

1939, and its adverse effect on Poland's emigration needs. Subsequently, Poland was seeking to secure fifty per cent of all remaining labour certificates for its Jews. The British decision

adversely affected Poland's expectation that Palestine as a National Home of the Jews and a natural immigration venue for them, might constitute an important immigration territory and make it possible, to a certain extent at least, to find a solution to the pressing problem of Jewish emigration from Poland. The Polish Government would be much gratified if the British Government, which has manifested so much understanding of the importance for Poland of this problem, could see its way to open up other territories as an equivalent outlet for the Jewish emigration from Poland.

More specifically, the Poles asked that Polish Jews be included in any resettlement schemes for Jewish refugees whether in Guiana or elsewhere.⁷⁹

The Poles also stirred up the Committee for Jewish Colonization Affairs, inactive after February 1939, into renewed activity. In July 1939, the Committee resumed its dealings with the Intergovernmental Committee in order to strengthen the Polish case for Jewish settlement in British Guiana.⁸⁰

Thus even before the outbreak of war put an end to the NZO's plans for Polish-sponsored Zion-Sejm, the underlying principles of the alliance between Poland and the NZO were being openly challenged. The Polish factor which figured so decisively in the NZO's diplomatic offensive had reached an impasse.

⁷⁹ Aide-mémoire submitted to the British Foreign Office by Ambassador Raczyński, 10 June 1939, Public Record Office, London, FO 371/24084; Melzer, *Galed*, 1, 1973, Appendix, pp. 248–49.

⁸⁰ Melzer, *Maavak*, pp. 330–31, 350.